

R 271135Z MAY 86
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5472

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 03266

TERREP

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [IS](#)
SUBJ: TALKING ABOUT ABU NIDAL

REF: STATE 165238

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT

2. THE RECENT INSTRUCTION TO ATHENS CONCERNING ABU NIDAL ACTIVITIES IN SYRIA PROMPTS US TO SUGGEST SOME ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS FOR POSSIBLE FUTURE USE IN DISCUSSING THIS DIFFICULT SUBJECT WITH FRIENDS AND ALLIES.

3. WE HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE HERE OF CONTACTS BY ABU NIDAL REPRESENTATIVES WITH SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE OR WITH ABU NIDAL OPERATIVES WHO PASS THROUGH SYRIA, SO IT IS DIFFICULT TO SUGGEST THAT THE TWO OFFICES HERE ACT AS A BASE OF SUPPORT FOR ABU NIDAL OPERATIONS.

4. HOWEVER, IN TWO OTHER IMPORTANT WAYS, ABU NIDAL FIGURES IN DAMASCUS SEEM TO WORK HAND IN GLOVE WITH THE MAIN BODY OF THIS TERRORIST ORGANIZATION IN LIBYA. FIRST, LOCAL EUROPEAN EMBASSIES IN DAMASCUS HAVE RECEIVED VISITS OF LOCAL ABU NIDAL OFFICIALS IN THE AFTERMATH OF ATROCITIES IN AUSTRIA, ITALY, FRANCE AND PERHAPS ELSEWHERE. THE LINE IS INVARIABLY THE SAME, VERY SOFTLY BUT FIRMLY SUGGEST THAT THE DEATHS OF INNOCENT PEOPLE IS REGRETTABLE BUT THE ABU NIDAL ORGANIZATION HAS EVERY RIGHT TO CARRY OUT SUCH ACTIVITIES AGAINST ISRAELI TARGETS. THEN, IN SOME VERY CAREFUL, INDIRECT SENTENCES, THE OFFICIALS SUGGEST THAT IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO AVOID FUTURE OPERATIONS OF THIS SORT BY REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS. NO TERMS HAVE BEEN SET IN THE INSTANCES WE KNOW OF AND EXPLICIT OFFERS OF NEGOTIATIONS HAVE NOT BEEN MADE. INSTEAD, THE DOOR IS OPENED. IT IS INTERESTING BY-PRODUCT, AND MAYBE A COINCIDENTAL ONE, THAT WITH ABU NIDAL REPS IN DAMASCUS EUROPEANS INVARIABLY ASK SYRIA TO INTERVENE WITH ABU NIDAL AND HELP THEM RESOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS WITH TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS. THE PRESENCE OF THESE ABU NIDAL OFFICES IN DAMASCUS, THEREFORE, SERVES TO SUBTLY ENHANCE THE OPPORTUNITIES SYRIA HAS TO PLAY A DIPLOMATIC ROLE.

5. THE OTHER FUNCTION OF THESE OFFICES IS INDEED CULTURAL AND INFORMATIONAL, AS PRESIDENT ASAD HAS CLAIMED, AND IT CONSISTS OF ABU NIDAL REPS HANGING OUT IN LOCAL HOTELS AND COLLARING FOREIGN JOURNALISTS AND OFFICIALS. INTERVIEWS ARE OFFERED IN THE BIQA', ALONG WITH ESCORTS AND GUARANTEES OF SAFETY. ONE CBS CREW VISITING DAMASCUS IN THE PAST WEEK SPOKE QUITE FRANKLY OF THEIR DISCUSSIONS IN THE SHERATON ALONG THESE LINES AND SAID THAT IF AN APPROPRIATE INTERVIEW WERE ARRANGED, THAT IS WITH AN APPROPRIATE OFFICIAL, CBS WOULD TAKE ITS CAMERA CREW IMMEDIATELY. HOWEVER, SYRIANS DO NOT NECESSARILY APPROVE THESE CONTACTS BY ABU NIDAL REPRESENTATIVES, AND HAVE ACTED QUITE HARSHLY AGAINST SOME JOURNALISTS WHO HAVE TRIED TO FOLLOW THEM UP, BUT THE FACT REMAINS THAT SYRIA PROVIDES ABU NIDAL WITH A PULPIT AND A STAGE WHICH WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO REPRODUCE ELSEWHERE.

RANSOM